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BLOG & NEW POSTINGS

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RECOVERY WISDOM FROM AFRICA



Proverbs are the daughters of experience. (Rwandan proverb)

Knowledge that can be brought to bear on the recovery experience can be drawn from diverse cultural traditions. Such knowledge is often conveyed as metaphors, slogans, or proverbs. Below are a few examples drawn from the traditional wisdom of Africa. Where available, its origins within Africa are noted.

On the Value of Persistence and Incremental Steps

By trying often, the monkey learns to jump from the tree. (Buganda)

By crawling a child learns to stand.

To run is not necessarily to arrive. (Swahili)

If you are building a house and a nail breaks, do you stop building or do you change the nail? (Rwanda)

Denial

He who conceals his disease cannot expect to be cured. (Ethiopia)

Grandiosity

What is inflated too much will burst into fragments. (Ethiopia)

The fool speaks, the wise man listens. (Ethiopia)

Projection of Blame

He who cannot dance will say, "The Drum is bad." (Ashanti)

He who is unable to dance says that the yard is stony. (Masai)

Self-Pity

A man who continually laments is not heeded. (Kenya)

Hope

No matter how long the night, the day is sure to come. (Congo)

No Matter how long the winter, spring is sure to follow. (Guinea)

On Readiness to Change

When you are finished being sick, you know the remedy.

Humility (and Taking Inventory of Others)

The monkey does not see his own hind parts; he sees his neighbors. (Zimbabwe)

Gratitude

Do not tell the man who is carrying you that he stinks. (Sierra Leon)

One who recovers from sickness forgets about God. (Ethiopia)

Recovery as a Life Priority

He who hunts two rats catches none.

Finding One's own Recovery Path

Try this bracelet: if it fits you wear it, but if it hurts you, throw it away no matter how shiny. (Kenya)

The Power of Community and Mutual Support

When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion. (Ethiopia)

Cross the river in a crowd and the crocodile won't eat you.

Incremental Steps of Recovery

A little rain each day will fill the rivers to overflowing. (Liberia)

Drop by drop the ocean is filled. (Swahili)

On Close Calls and the Need for Sustained Recovery Vigilance

The hawk missed you, but it didn't forget about you.

Making Amends

If you offend, ask for pardon; if offended, forgive. (Ethiopia)

Discretion in Public Disclosures

Home affairs are not talked about on the public square.

People, Places, and Things

When you know who his friend is, you know who he is. (Senegal)

Fire and gunpowder do not sleep together. (Ashanti)

Offering Help to Others

Before healing others, heal thyself. (Nigeria)

Advise and counsel him; if he does not listen, let adversity teach him. (Ethiopia)

References:

Dinwiddie-Boyd, E. (1996). *In our own words: A treasury of quotations from the African American Community*. New York: Avon Books.

<http://afritorial.com/the-best-72-african-wise-proverbs/>

<https://matadornetwork.com/bnt/50-african-proverbs-to-get-you-thinking/>

Selected Papers of William L. White